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SUBJECT: MEDVEDEV'S CAMPAIGN TAKES SHAPE

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[¶](#)B. 07 MOSCOW 05800

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons: 1.4 (B) & (D)

Summary:

[¶](#)1. (SBU) Russians have few doubts that Dmitriy Medvedev will be the next president, but there is considerable uncertainty within the political class about the structure of power after his inauguration - particularly since this transition is complicated by questions about the role for a young, healthy, and popular Putin. With his own popularity ratings around 70%, the apparent heir's primary challenge in the coming months is not electioneering among the population, but building support among Russia's political constituencies independent of his mentor and benefactor. Unlike Putin, whose KGB service and leadership of the FSB provided him an institutional base for his presidency, Medvedev has to build his own support network. His campaign suggests that his focus is on regional elites -- who worked with him on the National Projects -- and his natural allies in the business community and the urban "middle class" who are inclined to support a Medvedev presidency focused on investments in human capital and continued moderate reform. Such a strategy offers the bureaucracy little clarity about changes in the political landscape after his election, and perhaps that is the intent. Medvedev and Putin may well want to keep the elite off balance in the run-up to the transition of power as they sort out the division of authority and responsibility on their own terms. End Summary.

An Element of Uncertainty

[¶](#)2. (C) Russia's population, political pundits, and administrative leaders are rallying around Putin's choice of Medvedev as the Russia's third post-Soviet president, leaving only the challenge of getting the turnout "just right" to give Medvedev a popular mandate without looking embarrassingly like Kazakhstan. Conversations with Embassy contacts, though, have revealed a natural undercurrent of uncertainty among the political elite about the shape of Russia's political system after the election dust settles. The \$60 million question is what role will Putin play in a Medvedev presidency -- regent, co-star in a system of dual power, or even as a leading actor to overshadow his successor?

[¶](#)3. (C) Gleb Pavlovskiy of the Center for Effective Policy sees Putin moving to revive the position of Premier to its constitutional stature and ending the de facto practice that he has followed of dominating both accounts. He told Embassy that Medvedev is likely to play to his strengths as a skilled

apparatchik and manager of social programs, while looking to Putin to do more of the heavy lifting on foreign policy and military issues. Pavlovskiy reiterated his belief that Medvedev is not the "weak" politician that others have suggested-- and sees him meeting the challenges of the presidency with the full support of his benefactor and mentor. Kremlin-connected commentator Andranik Migranyan likewise expects Medvedev to focus on "pocketbook" issues like housing and pensions, while leaning on Putin to help with foreign policy, military affairs, and controlling the security services (which he assumed will de facto remain under Putin's control.) As such, he sees Medvedev following the assertive "Munich" line that Putin has promoted in world affairs.

¶4. (C) Pavel Danilin, editor of the pro-Kremlin website Kreml.org, expressed concern that Medvedev's appointment swings the political pendulum too far to one side in Moscow's delicate balance of power. He told us that the transition will be a difficult period, as elements of the elite opposed to Medvedev's selection will seek to protect their interests. Danilin's comments echo the usual fear-mongering that Pavlovskiy has voiced about the "dark side" of the Kremlin elite -- mainly the security service faction headed by Igor Sechin -- but reflect, at least on one level, the uncertainty that must permeate Kremlin corridors.

Looking for Loyal, "Liberal" Allies

¶5. (SBU) Medvedev's campaign is not designed to answer the concerns of Kremlin insiders but to strike a chord with broader constituencies. His first major campaign address appeared to be directed at garnering the support of Russia's business class -- natural allies in his plans to follow the path of "Putin liberalism" -- and the "patriotic/progressive" urban middle class. His speech to the Civic Forum in Moscow evoked the agenda that Putin laid out in his first term and validated the candidate's credentials as a "Putin liberal." Like his presidential mentor, Medvedev underscored his certainty that "we are building democracy" in Russia, but one that combined fundamental democratic values with Russia's "national traditions." (Moreover, he made reference to the term "sovereign democracy" that Surkov and others have promoted as shorthand for Russia's special path to modernity.) And thus, he argued that Russia's foremost need is for continuation of calm, stable development to build upon the successes in establishing constitutional order and the elemental social guarantees to the population.

¶6. (SBU) Medvedev praised the work of Russia's civil society and strongly encouraged the NGOs and civil organizations gathered at the forum to help in the development process. As Putin did at the first Civic Forum in 2001, Medvedev called for dialogue between the government and civil society on the pressing issues of the day. However, his comments on civil society implied a continued dominance of the state in what he termed a "structured" civil society, in which dialogue takes place in government-initiated fora, such as the Public Chamber, which arranged the Civic Forum. At the same time, Medvedev openly criticized Russian society's "legal nihilism" and disdain for the law -- social ills that he saw as pervasive in Russian society. Echoing Putin's call for a "dictatorship of law," Medvedev said that Russia must become a government of law, starting with a national program to fight against official corruption.

¶7. (SBU) Medvedev also touted Russia's economic development and foresaw the country emerging as one of the top five economies in the world in the next 10-15 years. He promised to follow the course of free enterprise, to defend property rights, and to strengthen the principles of market economics. He also made reference to the importance of a free press at the federal and regional levels. Early indications, such as a private assessment of one of Moscow's leading investment houses, suggests that Medvedev's speech has resonated among the business elite, who are likely to rally around his presidential campaign.

Familiar Foreign Policy

¶18. (SBU) Medvedev's comments on the international environment showed little of the vitriol of Putin's Munich speech and more recent foreign policy pronouncements, although they echoed the position that Russia demands recognition and consideration of its interests. He explained away some of the West's "fear" of a revived Russia as a historical legacy of a time when his country was seen as "big, stubborn, and not fully understandable." He said that Moscow needed to explain its position and plans more clearly to assuage Western concerns, but also to look for "other" allies to implement collective solutions to global problems. Like Putin, Medvedev saw the CIS region as Russia's primary area of interest and promised continued engagement with "problem countries" -- most likely a reference to Moscow's relations with Iran, Syria, and North Korea.

Reaching out to Regional Elites

¶19. (C) Business and middle class voters are not Medvedev's only target audience and he also has been working to build his own base of support among regional elites. During his years of service and leadership of the "national projects," Medvedev has traveled to more than 60 of Russia's regions and has built relationships with Russia's regional elites and bureaucrats. Dmitriy Badovskiy of the Institute for Social Systems told Embassy on January 18 that regional elites nevertheless have questions about the "tandem" candidacy of Medvedev and Putin, not because of the personalities involved, but out of concern about the potential division of authority between the President and Premier. Since governors are appointed by the President, regional leaders naturally have some questions about the security of their position.

¶10. (C) Badovskiy said that Medvedev's regional trips to Murmansk, Kaliningrad, Tyumen, and Chelyabinsk were designed to allow the candidate to strengthen his ties to the governors and allay some of their nervousness about the transition. Sergey Mikheyev of the Center for Political Technologies likewise viewed Medvedev's travel as a means to find a "common language" with regional elites. But, Mikheyev was far more skeptical about Medvedev's ability to shake up regional politics or to make other hasty changes to the current system -- a message that Mikheyev thought Medvedev would make clear to the governors.

¶11. (SBU) A gathering of the leaders of the regional branches of Medvedev's election campaign in Moscow on January 22 can be seen as an element of Medvedev's outreach to the regional elites. Press reports note that his staff will be composed primarily of experienced administrators from regional governments, rather than the party structures in the oblasts.

Excepting some particular "problem" regions, where United Russia received lower-than-average returns in the December Duma elections (for example St. Petersburg), deputy governors or other top administrators will head the campaign staff. The fate of the governors of Yaroslavl and Smolensk, for whom the failure to achieve "expected" results in December provided the pretext for their removal, inevitably hangs over the heads of other regional leaders -- likely making them equally eager to cement ties to Medvedev.

Comment:

¶12. (SBU) Russia's elite are breaking new ground in this transition, with natural nervousness about an as yet unproven post-inaugural relationship between Putin and Medvedev. Part of Putin's gamble is that Medvedev has the moxie and political skills to assume the job of balancing Russia's complex power relationships. Medvedev's choice of businessmen and regional leaders as the core of his support base appears to confirm the conventional wisdom that he will follow a "liberal" (by Russian standards) vector in his domestic policy. Such a strategy involves risks, and it

appears Putin will help to provide Medvedev some breathing room by continuing to play the role of arbiter among the Kremlin camps and bureaucratic forces. Keeping the elite off balance and fostering at least some uncertainty has long been a Putin political tactic and may be an intentional aspect of Medvedev's campaign program.

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